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THE PARENTS' REVIEW

A MONTHLY MAGAZINE

OF HOME-TRAINING AND CULTURE.

"Education is an atmosphere, a discipline, a life."

THE PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION.*

BY A. T. SCHOFIELD, ESQ., M.D.

(Chairman, Executive Parents' National Educational Union).

THE practical importance of the subject of this paper is, in the face of the increasing struggle for existence, beyond all dispute; but the difficulty of speaking on it is great, because one is compelled to use terms from which many English psychologists still shrink, and yet which most in some way or another are obliged tacitly to agree to. We refer to the unconscious faculties of the mind. Without actually insisting on the phrase that best expresses these, viz., the unconscious mind, there is no doubt that most advanced educationalists, amongst whom we include Herbert Spencer, Herbart, Pestalozzi, Froebel, J. P. Richter, Preyer, C. Mason, and many others, clearly recognise that the best and most efficacious form of child-training is that which is addressed to unconsciousness rather than to consciousness; in short, each and all admit, though most probably some would shrink from the words, that there are unconscious psychic powers, and that these can be educated; and not only so, but that it is on their proper education rather than on that addressed to consciousness that the most important part of the character of the individual depends. Dr. Carpenter, for example, says:—

"There are two sorts of influence: that which is active and

* Read on Monday, May 16th, at the Victoria Institute.

voluntary and which we exert purposively; and that which is unconscious and flows from us unawares to ourselves. The influence we exert unconsciously will hardly ever disagree with our real character." *

Of course education in the ordinary sense knows nothing of this. "For a long time the error prevailed that for a child's first learning there was absolute necessity of a teacher, as if only complete thought could be impressed on the child's brain, and that only by this means the mind would finally be developed in the right manner. *Herein lies a gross fallacy.*" † The fallacy is, in fact, that only the conscious mind is susceptible of education.

What is generally understood by early education and child-training is the guidance of the child consciously, by rules and commands and precepts (a fresh one, may be, each day) enforced by smacks and slaps and other penal measures many times a day, coupled with direct instruction in A B C, 1 2 3, and other forerunners of intellectual culture.

Herbert Spencer forcibly describes the prevailing ignorance and what ordinarily passes as parental education. "While it is seen that to gain a livelihood an elaborate preparation is needed, it appears to be thought that for the bringing up of children no preparation whatever is needed. Not an hour is spent by either a boy or girl in preparation for that gravest of all responsibilities—the management of a family. No rational plea can be put forward for leaving the act of Education out of our curriculum. The subject which involves all other subjects, and that in which education should culminate is the theory and practice of education. The management of children is lamentably bad. In most cases the treatment adopted on every occasion is that which the impulse of the moment prompts, and varies from hour to hour, as the feelings vary." ‡

Conscious education has been varied in every conceivable way. There has been reading with tears, and reading without tears, nursery rule, drawing-room rule, schoolroom rule, but every fad and every variety has followed the same mistaken principle, namely: all education, all training worthy of the

* W. B. Carpenter, *Mental Physiology*. 4th edition, p. 542.

† Preyer, *Mental Development of Childhood*, p. 60.

‡ Herbert Spencer, *Education*, pp. 95, 96.

name, must address itself to the child's consciousness, *i.e.*, the conscious mind. And this is the tap root error of every such system.

Here the practical man intervenes with the pertinent question, "If this generally adopted system is so bad, so vicious and so pernicious, how is it we get as its result good children, good men, and good women with well developed and well balanced minds?"

At first sight this question seems conclusive in favour of the value and sufficiency, for all practical purposes, of conscious education.

But the true answer is that whether the parent likes it or no, whether the parent knows it or not, whether the parent helps it, hinders it, or ignores it, the education of the unconscious is ever going on; aye, and going on faster far than that of the conscious; and whatever the child subsequently turns out to be, will be far rather due to *this* than to all the direct efforts made by the parent.

All around the child lie countless forces, unnoticed and unknown by the parent, while within the child lies a vast receptive capacity, unknown to the parent, and still largely ignored by these psychologists who should be his teachers—the unconscious mind: and it is to the action of these unnoticed forces upon the ignored mind that the child's real early education and character is mainly due. And this proceeds through life, and indeed, is dimly perceived sooner or later by parents. Take, for instance, the value of a public school education. Does not every parent who has a son at Eton or Harrow well know that the greatest value to the boy is the unconscious education he receives, and not the lessons addressed to his conscious mind?

Here is the reason, then, why an untrained child, that is one whose conscious training has been neglected, grows up often so well. This has been a standing puzzle for ages. One parent adopts all the paraphernalia placed at her disposal for the artificial fashioning of her child's mind; the other lets the child run absolutely wild; and the result is often to make the former doubt the wisdom of her methods.

Now the secret is that, through good luck it may be rather than good care, the "wild" child has been cast amongst unnoticed forces, beneficial to its character, that have trained

its unconscious mind and produced the better result of the two.

And this brings us to a further point in the education of the unconscious mind. It is *nature's education*, natural, and therefore divine, instead of artificial and thus human. This education is no invention of ours. All that is done here is to point out its existence and its importance, and indicate the methods by which the education may be guided into good and wise channels, instead of bad; always remembering that for good or ill, this education steadily proceeds all our lives, though pre-eminently in childhood.

"The soul (unconsciously) observes and reflects and assimilates the countless products of nature and art which enter it. The result is formation of character, and all which we call life is impressed. The influences from without make a man what he is."*

"We are momentarily under the influence of outward events, which are registered within, and become, as it were, part of ourselves; being, indeed, factors in most of our feelings and motives."†

"The least valuable part of education is that which we owe to the schoolmaster (conscious); the most precious lessons are those which we learn out of school (unconscious)."‡

Let us not, however, think from this that direct teaching, instruction, and precept, too, have not their right and proper place, but it is indeed a far lower and humbler one than that generally imagined, and far indeed from occupying the exclusive place it has been given.

Three varieties of education are possible with regard to consciousness and unconsciousness: First, there is the ordinary education; the conscious instruction of the conscious; as, for example, in being taught the French language by a master and books. Secondly, there is the unconscious education of the conscious; or in other words, the education of the conscious through the unconscious. In this it is the unconscious mind that is primarily reached, but the education does not stop there, but is passed on by the unconscious into consciousness; as, for example, when French

* Dr. Jno. Pollock, *Book of Health*, p. 525.

† *Ibid.*, p. 524.

‡ Sir J. C. Browne, *Book of Health*, p. 345.

is imbibed from residence in France, without conscious effort or definite instruction, or as the French language is learnt by French children. The knowledge reaches consciousness, and the child in each case knows well it can speak French, only the process of education has been addressed in this case to the unconscious mind. Then, lastly, there is the education of the unconscious mind that does not pass on or rise into consciousness, but, as a rule, terminates there; such as, for instance, all those traits and characteristics that distinguish a child brought up in France from one brought up in England. Under this head, too, come motives, character, conscience, principles, intuitions, all of which have their home in unconsciousness.

On some of these we can, indeed, turn the bull's eye of consciousness with an effort, but their *sphere* is in the unconscious; and the bringing up of them frequently into consciousness, by careful introspection, often leads to mental hypochondriasis; just as bringing the unconscious organic functions and actions into notice lead to physical hypochondriasis and hysteria. It is well to recognise there are two spheres or divisions of mind, which, to a certain extent, can be made to overlap, but which, nevertheless, have their distinctive properties and value—the springs, the foundations, roots, and principles of life, which lie rather in the Unconscious; the flowers and fruits and actions which lie in the Conscious.

Now, in thus speaking of education, we must, therefore, first distinguish broadly between conscious and unconscious education; and secondly, we can subdivide the latter—unconscious education—as we have seen, into that which eventually rises into consciousness in its results though not in the process, and that where both results and process are sub-conscious. We fully justify, however, the right to apply the term "education of the unconscious mind" to both these latter; and, therefore, to all education received unconsciously, whatever its ultimate fruits may be; and with this explanation shall continue to use all references and quotations referring to such training, as examples of the "education of the unconscious mind"; specially emphasising, however, those particular processes which do not go further, but expend their whole force on developing this all-important part of our mental life.

The net result, therefore, of what we have already stated is this: That the conscious education and training by which the greatest store is generally set, is not, after all, the training that is most determining the child's future. This is rather decided by the training and educating of the child's unconscious mind for good or evil that is going on at the same time entirely outside the parents' cognizance.

Now it is to this that we wish to direct especial attention, in order that what we mean by the phrase "the education of the unconscious mind" may be understood.

It is surely all-important, if our children are surrounded with these unnoticed powers, that we should know something of them, and of the laws by which they act; and of the power we may have to direct them for good and not for evil in their unseen workings on our child's nature.

The object of this education is character rather than learning. Direct instruction, or book-learning as it is called, must be addressed to consciousness; character in formative education is best carried out through the unconscious. As to character, "Children," Herbart says, "have very marked individuality without possessing character. Children are wanting in that which, above all, goes to make up character—that is Will. Willing determination take place in consciousness; individuality, on the other hand, is unconscious." *

"In those early impressions of which no one seems to be conscious, least of all the child, and which gathers up power as the rolling avalanche, the elements are collected for future emotions, moods, etc., that make up a greater part of the history of the individual." †

"The strong individual struggles out of individuality into character, the weak lets himself slide out of the domain of the conscious to the unconscious." ‡

The fruit, of course, of the education of the unconscious in us is only seen by ourselves by results in consciousness; others, however, can see results of which we may be wholly unconscious.

One great point in favour of this unconscious education is that it does not interfere with the happiness of childlife, but

* J. F. Herbart, *Science of Education*, 2nd edit., pp. 116, 117.

† Dr. L. Waldstein, *The Subconscious Self*, p. 47.

‡ J. F. Herbart, *Science of Education*, 2nd edit., pp. 116, 117.

increases it; and this is no small matter. A house without sunshine lowers the whole physical health, and a home without happiness lowers the whole psychical health. The awful effects of a miserable infancy and unhappy childhood are seen afterwards in the adult, who is like a plant which has been reared without sunshine. Happiness in the family is a *sine quâ non* for a mentally healthy child.

We do not require to create happiness in children, but only to see that we do not destroy it. The happiness of a child, in the first instance, is spontaneous, and is drawn largely from within (its own imagination); afterwards from without. In childhood the pains it suffers are mainly physical—few mental: while its pleasures are both physical and largely psychical; therefore, there is a far greater proportion of pleasure than pain in young as compared with adult life, where psychic pain forms the greater part. The balance of increasing pain seems to turn after puberty; when the child gets sadder, and more thoughtful.

"Due care being taken to elicit the benevolent sensibilities, it is the happiest children who will be the most sympathetic and unselfish." *

"How common it is to meet with irritable minds that spring up in opposition to any calm statement of facts with a sort of instinctive resentment. Such a state of mind may often be traced to circumstances of early life that called forth the principle of self-defence, long before reason had been developed." † In short, an unhappy childhood.

Bearing then, in considering our subject, these two great points in mind, that the object is the foundation of character and that the means must in no way interfere with that happiness which is the moral health of the child, let us see what general principle of unconscious mind education we can grasp from the teaching of Herbert Spencer.

Speaking of the value of unconscious education from surroundings, as compared with book instruction, he says:—

"Not perceiving the enormous value of that spontaneous education which goes on in early years, but perceiving that a child's restless observation instead of being ignored or checked, should be diligently ministered to, and made as

* Isaac Taylor, *Home Education*, p. 39.

† *Ibid.*, p. 42.

accurate and complete as possible, parents insist on occupying its eyes and thoughts with things that are for the time being incomprehensible and repugnant. They do not see that only when his acquaintance with the objects and processes of the household, the streets and the fields is becoming totally exhausted, only then shall a child be introduced to new sources of information which books supply."*

Anyone reading the above condensed passage will see that the self-education which H. Spencer here commends is largely, and in its earlier stages, acquired wholly unconsciously.

Now let us see the results of a perverted or bad education of the unconscious from the same author: "What kind of moral culture is to be expected from a mother who shakes her infant because it will not take its food? How much sense of justice is likely to be instilled by a father, who, hearing his child scream because its finger is jammed between the window sash and the sill, begins to beat it?"

"Who has not seen a child repeatedly slapped by nurse or parent for a fretfulness arising from bodily derangement? Are not the constant and often quite needless thwartings that the young experience—the injunctions to sit still, which an active child cannot obey without suffering great nervous irritation, the command not to look out of the window when travelling, &c., signs of a terrible lack of sympathy."†

There are few of us but could extend these instances almost indefinitely; but enough have been given to show what is meant by the bad education of the unconscious mind. Here the education is given to the child probably unconsciously by the parent, and certainly the evil is absorbed unconsciously by the child; and when, in later years, it turns out a tyrant or a bully, there are few who will see that the source of this developed character is this early mal-education of the unconscious mind. And yet so it is.

Is there, then, to be no discipline in education? Certainly there is; but not where not needed, and not capricious and arbitrary in its character. What it should be we will speak of further on.

(To be continued.)

* Herbert Spencer, *Education*, p. 26.

† *Ibid.*, p. 98.

THE INTERDEPENDENCE OF LITERATURE AND HISTORY.

BY H. A. NESBITT, M.A.

THERE are many points of view from which History may be studied; there is that of the lawyer, of the politician, of the economist, of the soldier, of the moralist; but the educationist has not to consider these special aspects of History. His object is to present to the pupils a picture of the men and manners of past times, to try and help them to realise in some degree the tone of thought, the standard of right and wrong, the views of life, the feelings and beliefs that prompted the actions of our forefathers. Often we find these actions incomprehensible to us unless we can throw off our own atmosphere of thought and put on, like a strange garment, the prejudices, the false theories, the ignorance on the one hand, together with the grim earnestness, the devotion to a high ideal, even if a mistaken one, the unflinching pursuit of what was deemed the right, on the other, which characterised the age we are studying. To do this the most obvious plan is to steep ourselves in the writings of the time, other than mere histories, and so to try to enter into the minds of men of other days. And here we are met with a constantly recurring difficulty. The men of action and the men of the pen have generally been not only different in personality, but have moved as it were in different planes of thought. Again and again we read books that were written at times of great events and are surprised to find how few and unimportant are the allusions to contemporary history. The writings of Alfred do not allude to the Danes. Layaman's *Brut* does not mention Normans or Barons. In the *Owl and the Nightingale* or *King Horn* or *Havelok the Dane* there is no allusion either to Crusades or to Civil troubles. Chaucer lived during the time of the French wars; he was himself a prisoner in France, he was contemporary with the great pestilence which took off one-third of the inhabitants of Europe, and depopulated whole parishes in England; the revolt of the peasants under Wat Tyler must have frightened him, together with the rest of the well-to-do classes, and yet Chaucer never mentions Cressy and Poitiers,